

DECISION MEMO
NONSIGNIFICANT AMENDMENT TO THE
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND GRASSLANDS
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST, MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTH DAKOTA

AMENDMENT NUMBER 38,
MANAGEMENT AREA O

REVA GAP CAMPGROUND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

USDA Forest Service
Northern Region (R1)
Sioux Ranger District of the Custer National Forest
Harding County, South Dakota

Introduction

The purpose of the Reva Gap project is to respond to goals, and objectives of the National Fire Plan, the Custer National Forest Plan and move the area toward the desired future condition described in the plan. The Forest Plan includes both forest-wide goals and objectives, and management area specific goals and objectives. Applicable National Fire Plan goals and objectives include:

- Reduce the number of small fires that become large.
- Restore natural ecological systems to minimize uncharacteristically intense fires.
- Reduce the threat to life and property from catastrophic wildfires.

The Reva Gap Campground contains dense understory stands of ponderosa pine seedlings, saplings, and poles with accumulated ground fuels such as needles and grasses. To protect the investments in the campground there is a need to reduce stepladder fuels (small ponderosa pine trees) and a portion of the ground fuels on 120 acres. The project will reduce the number of ponderosa pine seedlings, saplings, and poles along with hazard trees. The slash resulting from understory thinning will be piled and burned. Finally, a low intensity prescribed burn will be used to reduce ground fuels while maintaining a litter layer to protect soils and reduce the amount of pine regeneration.

The desired condition for the Reva Gap Campground is to retain a mature stand of ponderosa pine trees, and all hardwood species. In addition, a portion of ponderosa pine saplings and poles will be retained to provide solitude between campground units.

Decision

I have reviewed the environmental analysis and decided to reduce the fire hazard on about 120 acres in the Reva Campground area by removing small diameter ponderosa pine trees while retaining mature trees. This will be accomplished by cutting pine trees to reduce the overall number of trees per acre. The created slash from this activity will be piled and burned. Finally, a prescribed burn will be used to reduce the amount of accumulated grass and small diameter ground fuels.

The Reva Gap Campground is located in Management Areas F (Developed Recreation), and O (National Natural Landmark). Management Area O precludes prescribed fire. This Decision Memo makes a one time site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan to approve a prescribed burn in Reva Gap Campground.

Slash from cutting will be piled for burning in previously disturbed areas such as four wheel drive tracks or roads to protect cultural or historical sites. The prescribed burn will be of low intensity and will not exceed an intensity that precludes the use of hand crews.

Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances

Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the presence of steep slopes or highly erosive soils; threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat; flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas; inventoried roadless areas; Research Natural Areas; or Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils. The Reva Gap project area is covered with vegetation that includes ponderosa pine, shrubs and grasses with slopes ranging from 8% to 40%. The average slope in the project area averages 20%. There are several locations on the eastside of the project area where the slopes pitch to about 60%. These pitches are 2 to 3 acres in size and total about 10 acres. The soils in the project area are susceptible to erosion. The prescribed burn is designed for a low intensity fire that will retain a litter layer to reduce ponderosa pine regeneration. This will have an added affect of protecting soils from erosion and protect the 10 acres on the steep slopes (Project Record).

Threatened and Endangered Species or their Critical Habitat. The biological assessment completed on 12/13/00 determined that there were "No Effect" to threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat (Project Record).

Floodplains, Wetlands or Municipal Watersheds. Review of the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan along with review of maps, photographs, and a ground survey determined that the project area does not contain any floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds (Project Record).

Congressionally Designated Areas. Review of the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan determined that the project area does not contain any congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas (Project Record).

Inventoried Roadless Areas. Review of the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation determined that the project area does not contain any inventoried roadless areas (Project Record).

Research Natural Areas. Review of the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan determined that the project area does not contain any research natural areas (Project Plan).

Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas. A heritage resource review was completed on 01/08/01 that determined the project would have not effect to heritage resources (Project Record).

This action does not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Therefore, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Category of the Proposed Action

The proposed action falls under Category 5, in Section 31.1b of the *Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook*. Based on an environmental analysis and past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no environmental effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment (Project Record).

Public Involvement

The proposed action was mailed to about 80 individuals between October 18, 2000 and November 20, 2000. The Sioux District received three letters and the concerns are summarized below with responses. The scoping list, comment letters and comment analysis are located in the project record. The following concerns were identified:

Comment 1. Incorporate weather and wind conditions into the planning process for the proposed prescribed burning project.

- Response. Before burning, a prescribed fire plan will be prepared for the Reva Gap. As part of that plan, a fire behavior model is used to design the prescribed burn. The fire behavior model incorporates weather and wind conditions as parameters to achieve a safe burn. The sequence for the projects at Reva Campground is to reduce the number of trees by thinning the conifer understory followed by piling of cut material. The piles will then be burned during late fall to early spring following the cutting. Finally, the campground will undergo a prescribed burn. A low intensity, short duration ground fire will be used to remove small diameter ground fuels.

Comment 2. Implement the pile and prescribed burning projects using proper supervision.

- Response. The pile burning and prescribed burning projects for Reva Gap Campground will use qualified fire personnel that meet national fire standards. During the prescribed burning, additional fire suppression crews will be on standby to help in an emergency.

Comment 3. Agree with the Forest Service plan to treat the vegetation in the Reva Gap Campground.

- Response. Thank you for this comment.

Comment 4. The Forest Service needs to treat the vegetation in the remaining portions of the Slim Buttes.

- Response. This comment is outside the scope of this project. The Forest Service does understand the concern and will try to address the issue at a later date as funding becomes available.

Findings Required By Other Laws

This decision with respect to Management Area F is consistent with the Forest Plan. The actions in this project comply fully with the goals of the Forest Plan, the Management Area Direction, including that contained under management prescription, and the Forest-wide standards and guidelines (See

Chapter II of the CNF Land and Resource Management Plan, Pages 3-9, and Chapter III, CNF Plan, pages 61-63).

This decision with respect to Management Area O is not consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines since the Plan (page 87) states, "planned ignitions will not be used as a management tool." Therefore, a one time site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan is necessary to fully implement this project. Specific changes made are documented in the attached plan amendment. I find that this is a non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan.

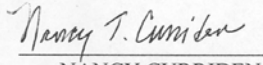
Floodplain, wetlands, prime lands, threatened and endangered species, minerals, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected (Project Record).

Implementation Date and Administrative Review

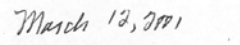
Implementation of this decision is effective immediately. The decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215 (a)(4).

Contact Person

For further information, contact George Foley at P.O. Box 37, Camp Crook, SD 57724 or telephone (605) 797-4432.



NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor



Date

FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT, NUMBER 38
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST
BILLINGS, MONTANA

The Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is amended as follows:

This amendment changes the management standard on page 87 of the Forest Plan, under C: Management Standards, 8. Fire Management, item (b) Prescribed Fire. This amendment allows for a one time site-specific prescribed burn in Reva Gap Campground that is located in Management Area O. The prescribed burn will remove accumulated dead grass and small diameter fuels.

Nancy J. Curriden
NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor

March 12, 2001
Date

**DECISION MEMO
NONSIGNIFICANT AMENDMENT TO THE
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND GRASSLANDS
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST, MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTH DAKOTA**

**AMENDMENT NUMBER 38,
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The desired condition for the Reva Gap Campground is to retain a mature stand of ponderosa pine trees, and all hardwood species. In addition, a portion of ponderosa pine saplings and poles will be retained to provide solitude between campground units.

Decision

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The Reva Gap Campground is located in Management Areas F (Developed Recreation), and O (National Natural Landmark). Management Area O precludes prescribed fire. This Decision Memo makes a one time site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan to approve a prescribed burn in Reva Gap Campground.

Slash from cutting will be piled for burning in previously disturbed areas such as four wheel drive tracks or roads to protect cultural or historical sites. The prescribed burn will be of low intensity and will not exceed an intensity that precludes the use of hand crews.

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Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the presence of steep slopes or highly erosive soils; threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat; flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas; inventoried roadless areas; Research Natural Areas; or Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils. The Reva Gap project area is covered with vegetation that includes ponderosa pine, shrubs and grasses with slopes ranging from 8% to 40%. The average slope in the project area averages 20%. There are several locations on the eastside of the project area where the slopes pitch to about 60%. These pitches are 2 to 3 acres in size and total about 10 acres. The soils in the project area are susceptible to erosion. The prescribed burn is designed for a low intensity fire that will retain a litter layer to reduce ponderosa pine regeneration. This will have an added affect of protecting soils from erosion and protect the 10 acres on the steep slopes (Project Record).

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This action does not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Therefore, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Category of the Proposed Action

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Public Involvement

The proposed action was mailed to about 80 individuals between October 18, 2000 and November 20, 2000. The Sioux District received three letters and the concerns are summarized below with responses. The scoping list, comment letters and comment analysis are located in the project record. The following concerns were identified:

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- Response. Before burning, a prescribed fire plan will be prepared for the Reva Gap. As part of that plan, a fire behavior model is used to design the prescribed burn. The fire behavior model incorporates weather and wind conditions as parameters to achieve a safe burn. The sequence for the projects at Reva Campground is to reduce the number of trees by thinning the conifer understory followed by piling of cut material. The piles will then be burned during late fall to early spring following the cutting. Finally, the campground will undergo a prescribed burn. A low intensity, short duration ground fire will be used to remove small diameter ground fuels.

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This decision with respect to Management Area O is not consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines since the Plan (page 87) states, "planned ignitions will not be used as a management tool." Therefore, a one time site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan is necessary to fully implement this project. Specific changes made are documented in the attached plan amendment. I find that this is a non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan.

Floodplain, wetlands, prime lands, threatened and endangered species, minerals, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected (Project Record).

Implementation Date and Administrative Review

Implementation of this decision is effective immediately. The decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215 (a)(4).

Contact Person

For further information, contact George Foley at P.O. Box 37, Camp Crook, SD 57724 or telephone (605) 797-4432.

Nancy T. Curriden

NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor

March 13, 2001

Date

FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT, NUMBER 38
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST
BILLINGS, MONTANA

The Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is amended as follows:

This amendment changes the management standard on page 87 of the Forest Plan, under C: Management Standards, 8. Fire Management, item (b) Prescribed Fire. This amendment allows for a one time site-specific prescribed burn in Reva Gap Campground that is located in Management Area O. The prescribed burn will remove accumulated dead grass and small diameter fuels.

Nancy J. Curriden

NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor

March 12, 2001

Date

August 2, 2001 Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Section 18 Review
Of the

DECISION MEMO
NONSIGNIFICANT AMENDMENT TO THE
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND GRASSLANDS
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
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AMENDMENT NUMBER 38,
MANAGEMENT AREA O

REVA GAP CAMPGROUND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

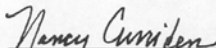
USDA Forest Service
Northern Region (R1)
Sioux Ranger District of the Custer National Forest
Harding County, South Dakota

My March 12, 2001 decision to reduce the fire hazard on approximately 120 acres in the Reva Gap Campground did not include mitigation measures for effects to the public users of the site during hazard abatement activities.

The safety of the public within the developed campground and picnic area may be compromised during tree cutting and pile burning. To protect public health and safety, I have decided that those portions of the developed site affected by operations will be closed through special order while fuel abatement activities are taking place. A copy of the Forest Order closing those parts of the Reva Gap Campground is enclosed.

I have reviewed this new information and changed circumstances relating to the environmental effects of the proposed action. I find that this new information is within the context of the overall project, does not change the environmental effects of the proposal, and that a correction, supplement, or revision to the original environmental document is not necessary. The proposed project may proceed. These findings are hereby incorporated into the project file.

For further information, contact District Ranger George Foley at P.O. Box 37, Camp Crook, SD 57724 or telephone (605) 797-4432.


NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor


Date

OCCUPANCY AND USE RESTRICTIONS
OF REVA GAP CAMPGROUND AND PICNIC AREA
CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST
REGION ONE

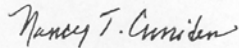
Pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations 261.50 (a) and (b), the following acts are prohibited on National Forest lands within Reva Gap Campground and Picnic Area. These restrictions are in addition to those enumerated in Subpart A, Part 261, Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, and become effective when the Order is signed. The restrictions herein described shall terminate on December 31, 2001.

1. Areas within Reva Gap Campground and Picnic Area affected by hazard abatement operations will be closed to any use as posted on the ground between August 13, 2001 and December 31, 2001. For information regarding which parts of the campground that are open please contact the District Ranger.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons may be exempt from this order:

1. Persons with a permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission.
2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty.

Done this 2nd day of August, 2001



NANCY T. CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor
Custer National Forest

Violations of these prohibitions are punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than 6 months or both (15 USC 551 and 18 USC 3559 and 3571).

August 2, 2001 Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Section 18 Review
Of the

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REVA GAP CAMPGROUND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

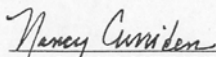
USDA Forest Service
Northern Region (R1)
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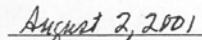
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For further information, contact District Ranger George Foley at P.O. Box 37, Camp Crook, SD 57724 or telephone (605) 797-4432.



NANCY CURRIDEN
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Date